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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: MONTH THREE OF GENERAL SOCIAL CALM BEGINS, AS  
MEDIATION AND POLITICAL POSTURING CONTINUE

REF: A: ANTANANARIVO 364 B: ANTANANARIVO 370

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: With the exception of a brief flare up of violent confrontations April 20-25, Madagascar and Antananarivo are moving into the third month of general social calm since the coup of mid-March. The generally positive conditions reported in refs A and B continue to prevail. Through the period since March there have been no reported attacks or credible threats against foreigners or the US mission. Political dialogue led by the international mediation team continues fitfully, punctuated with political posturing by all sides. The talks continue behind the scenes none the less and the mediators remain optimistic that the process is moving forward toward a signed charter of the transition by (optimistically) June 11. The military remains largely apathetic. Shopping areas frequented by expats and the US community remain well stocked and secure as do gas stations. Restaurants are open, and anecdotally tourists are reported to be returning. The airport is open and operating normally. END SUMMARY.

#### Daily Life Continues Normally

¶2. (SBU) The situation remains calm in Antananarivo, with no clashes between protestors and police in the capital since April 25, despite almost daily non-violent, stationary small-scale protests in favor of Ravalomanana. The rest of the country remained calm as well, with only one minor skirmish between security forces and protestors reported in Antsirabe May 23, during which police used tear gas to disperse a small crowd, causing minor injuries. Life goes on as normal for locals and expatriates, with grocery stores, supermarkets, gas stations, and other stores well-stocked. Food in the city appears readily available for the local population as well. A visible security presence remains deployed throughout the city. All airports have remained operational since the crisis began, and the embassy has not been closed due to political confrontations since March 18. As reflected in the May 27-28 military "assises", the military has settled into inactivity and seems resigned to lay low, allowing the politicians to sort out Madagascar's governance issues without its intervention (DAO septel).

#### Talks on Hold but Shuttle Diplomacy Continues

¶3. (SBU) The International Contact Group (ICG) mediators from the African Union and SADC convened ICG members and local diplomats, as well as a visiting delegation from the Indian Ocean Commission, on May 29 to provide an update on the status of the Malagasy political negotiations. AU Mediator Ablasse Ouedraogo explained that, although negotiations have not advanced this week, they have not lost ground, and he remains optimistic that remaining issues can be worked out following a potential relocation of negotiations to Addis Ababa June 6. Ouedraogo explained that the three former presidents, Ratsiraka, Zafy, and Ravalomanana, as well as transition leader Rajoelina, would not participate directly in negotiations at Addis but would be located nearby. This move would allow currently exiled leaders Ravalomanana and Ratsiraka to quickly provide guidance to their delegations. Ouedraogo has submitted a budget request to the AU for the move, but requested support from the international

community in providing a sixty seat airplane to transport the delegations. He optimistically aims for Ratsiraka, Zafy, Ravalomanana, and Rajoelina to sign the transition charter by June 11 in Addis, or at the latest by June 26, Madagascar's Independence Day.

14. (SBU) The four movements were all given copies of a draft transition charter to review on May 25. They agreed to meet May 27 to continue negotiations, but Ratsiraka's team requested additional time to review the document and raised two preconditions prior to resuming talks: 1) an annulment of legal claims and judgments against him and his supporters arising from 2002 events and 2) a cancellation of the ordinance creating the National Defense Military Council (CMDN) that was issued unilaterally by the transition administration (HAT) with disregard to the ongoing discussions. Ouedraogo explained that all four movements had already agreed to an amnesty, absent gross human rights violations and other egregious acts, that the issue of the CMDN would be raised with Rajoelina upon his return, and that he encouraged Ratsiraka's team to bring their concerns to the negotiating table. Ouedraogo planned to contact the heads of the four delegations to meet following the ICG meeting May 29 to talk about these concerns. Negotiations will resume once Ratsiraka's team gives the green light.

#### Inflammatory Rhetoric and Rumors

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15. (SBU) Despite inflammatory media statements by Rajoelina that the HAT would never agree to Ravalomanana's return (May 27), which Ouedraogo attributed to Rajoelina's need to assure his supporters prior to his departure from country, and Ravalomanana's claims that France was entirely responsible for his overthrow (May 26) and then that he would return with troops and punish all those military

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personnel involved in the coup (May 28), shuttle diplomacy by the AU and SADC continues with each of the delegations. The delegations are reviewing the draft charter to identify concerns for further discussion. Ouedraogo identified the key remaining sticking points as the composition and leadership of the HAT, members of the transition congress, and the make-up of the national unity government. The French Ambassador added that the timing and conditions of Ravalomanana's return have not yet been decided, but believed that although difficult points remained to be resolved, the delegations had the political will to do so, noting in addition France is in regular contact with Ratsiraka urging his cooperation.

16. (SBU) In keeping with the rumor mill that runs here media reports of "hundreds of troops" descending on the airport May 28 because of rumors of Ravalomanana's "imminent return" actually consisted of a beefed up presence of 20-30 personnel who in no way disrupted operations according to Embassy GSO expeditors and DAO contacts.

#### SADC Envoy to Depart and Report to King

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17. (SBU) SADC Envoy Absalom Dlamini will depart May 29 to return to Swaziland and provide a report to the Swazi King. He also hopes to pressure Ravalomanana to limit irresponsible, inflammatory rhetoric. Dlamini clarified that SADC will only be providing moral support to Ravalomanana, but no SADC brigade, and chalked Ravalomanana's assertions up to rhetoric to stir up his supporters. Ouedraogo urged all international community representatives with access to Ravalomanana to pass him this same message. UN Senior Mediator Tiebiele Drame is scheduled to return to Madagascar the week of June 11.

#### US Concern Regarding Head of Transition Running in Election

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18. (SBU) During the May 29 meeting, the Charge D'Affaires raised USG concern that the AU principle that the head of the transition government should not be able to run for president be respected, adding that if in fact the head of the transition did run for president while still leading the transition this would raise serious concern for the United States. Ouedraogo responded that he noted the US concern about this issue, but this decision rested with

the Malagasy involved in the negotiations. Privately, the SADC envoy and the UN representative expressed support for this principle, but lamented that they had lost this argument when the "none of the four can run" strategy, supported by Rajoelina, failed and was replaced by the "all can run" strategy that all parties have now agreed to support. In earlier meetings, the French Ambassador expressed the view that this principle, in addition to a signed consensual charter, was crucial to a successful outcome. In the event, today France was silent on the issue.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: Daily life throughout Madagascar has returned to normalcy, although the political situation remains unresolved. Despite this week's inflammatory political and media rhetoric, the negotiations are continuing and incremental progress has been made and maintained to date, although remaining issues, including the make up of the transition legislative and executive bodies will likely prove difficult to resolve. The resident diplomatic community consensus is that this stasis is likely to endure for some months without a return to violent street confrontations. END COMMENT.

STROMAYER